



CHAPTER SEVEN

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS



RECOMMENDATIONS

EVERYONE TAKES RESPONSIBILITY

Everyone Taking Responsibility

This report urges schools and communities to overtly address issues of character and values; outlines a vision for an ethical and responsible school culture; sets standards for student behavior; provides a process for communities to do the same; clearly links standards for ethical and responsible student behavior with the academic standards set forth in *Learning Results*; and shares exemplary practices from Maine schools that are on their way to achieving this vision. This report is not just about teachers, or students, or parents. Rather, it is about community and people in a variety of roles working together to improve the culture in Maine schools. If you are still wondering, “What can I do?”, and “What are my responsibilities?”, here are just a few of the actions that each of us as individuals can take in our varied roles in our communities:

► *School Boards*

- Facilitate community awareness and discussion on the topic of values and character, through scheduled discussions at school board meetings.
- Model community values in all interactions with constituents by applying a democratic and inclusive approach to all discussions.
- Authorize teachers to teach community values and model ethical and responsible behavior through the inclusion of ethics in the curriculum and through support of staff with time and resources necessary to integrate this teaching.
- Evaluate discipline policies and make recommendations to ensure both that interventions exist to stop negative behaviors and protect the safety of students, and that an educational or restorative component connects discipline to values, accountability, and prevention.
- Assist in the assessment of needs and outcomes by including strategic planning in the school board agenda.
- Support schools’ efforts by developing partnerships with citizen groups and business owners in the community.

➤ *Administrators*

- Adopt a leadership role in the discussion and identification of community values and standards of behavior.
- Serve as the primary liaison among all other stakeholders (i.e., school board, teachers, parents and community).
- Create and support student councils that are not merely tokens, but an integral and respected part of the school's decision-making process.
- Support teachers and staff in their teaching of community values and modeling ethical and responsible behavior by making a strong personal and professional commitment to these values and standards.
- Work as advocates to provide the time and resources for meaningful professional development in the area of values/character education.
- Work with teachers and staff to ensure that community values are fully integrated throughout the school curriculum and culture and not presented as an additional element.
- Promote meaningful recognition of teachers, staff, and students who exemplify community values and standards of ethical and responsible behavior.
- Develop partnerships with preschools, childcare providers, child advocacy groups, and pediatricians to ensure that parents recognize the significance of their role in fostering values and standards of ethical and responsible behavior during early childhood.
- Develop and maintain partnerships with citizen groups, non-profit organizations, and business owners as resources for mentoring and service learning programs.
- Implement and enforce discipline policies both to intervene to stop negative behavior and protect the safety of students, and to use an educational or restorative component to connect discipline to values, accountability, and prevention.
- Perform needs assessment, identify desired outcomes, gather pertinent baseline data, and ensure continual, multi-dimensional evaluation of efforts to create and sustain an ethical and responsible school culture.

➤ *Teachers and Staff*

- Become a committed participant in the discussion and identification of community values and standards of behavior.
- Work collaboratively with colleagues, parents and students to develop and reinforce the use of a common language for identifying community values.
- Model community values in all interactions with students, parents, fellow teachers, and other school staff, and expect the same in return.
- Use an integrative approach to teaching community values and standards for ethical and responsible behavior.
- Provide students with meaningful opportunities to apply values and standards for ethical and responsible behavior—both inside and outside of the classroom.
- Recognize students who exemplify community values and standards of ethical and responsible behavior.
- Honor, inform and involve parents in their critical role in fostering ethical and responsible behavior in their children.
- Ensure the consistent and equitable application of discipline policies everywhere in the school environment.
- Assist in needs assessment, identifying desired outcomes, gathering pertinent baseline data, and ensuring continual, multi-dimensional evaluation of efforts to create and sustain an ethical and responsible school culture.

➤ *Students*

- Become a committed participant in the discussion and identification of community values and standards of behavior.
- Keep parents informed of whereabouts, activities, frustrations, and goals.
- Seek knowledge and advice from admirable adults in the family, school and community.
- Offer recognition and praise to peers, teachers, relatives, friends, and other community members who exemplify and uphold community values and standards for behavior.
- Recognize and act upon the opportunity to be a positive role model to others of all ages, and to intervene as a model when appropriate.
- Take opportunities to lead not just academically or athletically, but ethically as well.
- Identify and act upon ways to serve the school and the community.
- Accept the consequences of personal actions, especially if restoration for a victim or the community is necessary.

➤ *Parents*

- Become a committed participant in the discussion and identification of community values and standards of behavior.
- Model community values and standards of behavior in the home.
- Clearly communicate expectations and values to all children.
- Do not make excuses for anyone's unacceptable behavior.
- Enforce consistent consequences for behavior that violates household rules.
- Listen to children and other family members when they want or need to talk.
- Maintain involvement in and awareness of the activities of family members, especially those of children.
- Praise children and other family members, not only for achievement, but also for ethical and responsible behavior.

➤ *Other Community Members*

- Become a committed participant in the discussion and identification of community values and standards of behavior.
- Strive to model community core values and standards for behavior in personal and professional life.
- Consider serving as a mentor to students or volunteering time and expertise to a school.
- Offer recognition and praise to students, teachers, and other community members who exemplify and uphold community values and standards of behavior.
- Offer and promote opportunities for students to serve the community.

CHANGING POLICY

Changing Policy to Meet the Challenge

Education leaders and policy makers have a role to play; they also must take responsibility. Policies, programs, and resources must be coordinated to further and support the outcomes described in this report. Leaders and policymakers should:

- **Use the legislative mandate for codes of conduct, and this report to spark extensive dialogue and real reforms in every community.**
 - * Model the intended outreach at the state level by involving traditional groups of educators, but go further to draw in and build on the central roles of parents, businesses, clergy, municipal officials, and other community-based (not just school-based) leadership.
- **Persist in and expand efforts to change the structures of schools to reflect a more democratic culture that is responsive to individualized learning needs.**
 - * Build on and expand the commendable work of the secondary education reform efforts tied to the recommendations of *Promising Futures*.
 - * Expand the focus on democratic structures and individualized learning plans throughout elementary, middle, and secondary schools.
- **Partner with existing programs and initiatives that address school climate, violence prevention, intervention, and asset-building, to support the development of the whole child.**
 - * Use and build on existing efforts such as the Maine Project Against Bullying, conflict resolution, Civil Rights Teams, Communities for Children/Communities of Promise, coordinated school health, mentoring, aspirations, restorative justice and service learning.
 - * Embed each program at the school level within the context of shared values and an ethical and responsible school culture.
- **Support training and development which equips all school staff to take action to support an ethical school culture.**
 - * Help provide the time, resources, and opportunities for staff to be good practitioners of behavioral intervention and to develop the ethical dimension of the curriculum.
 - * Include non-teaching staff as critical sources of modeling and intervention.
- **Establish outcome indicators and model assessment tools that schools can use to measure progress and test effectiveness.**
 - * Create or coordinate existing assessments across the several dimensions of student behavior and school climate, including measures of behavior, attitudes, perceptions, participation, and achievement of desired outcomes.

CONCLUSION

In our process and in this report, we have sought to honor the attributes and the values that we have identified here. We have endeavored to be respectful in listening to the voices of our students and educators; honest in describing the challenges we face; compassionate in supporting our students and schools to succeed; fair in holding expectations high for all of us, adults and students alike; responsible in advancing solutions that are systemic and long-term instead of simplistic and short-term; and courageous in tackling this subject with resolve. We make no claim to perfection; we have not always honored these values as fully as we would have liked. We can claim only to know the struggle.

Issues of ethics and behavior seem complex and daunting. Where do we begin? Can we achieve the ends we describe as right and good?

We know Maine communities can succeed in crafting thoughtful, consistent, coordinated efforts that will positively address behaviors and attitudes. We know because some Maine communities are already seeing success. These efforts will take time, commitment, resources, and hard work. It is the nature of education in a changing society that the work will never be done. But working together as a community, we can change our schools and communities into better places to live, learn, and work.

In the end, our work is only as good as the understanding, commitment, and energy that educators, students, and citizens around the State bring to the use of this report, and your willingness to take action upon it. We wish you courage in this endeavor.

"We become just by the practice of just action, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage."

-Aristotle

CONCLUSION

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The Commission for
Ethical and Responsible
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wishes to acknowledge the
important contribution of all those
who participated in the Student
Interviewing Project.
This project has been enriched
immeasurably by their
candor and dedication.

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